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THE BIBLE IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.¹

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SINCE the attempt to distinguish sharply between the principles that require or justify the grading of the curriculum, and those which determine how the graded curriculum should be constructed, would involve an embarrassing drawing of fine distinctions, I treat together the principles that justify the establishment of a graded curriculum and those that fix the main lines on which it should be constructed.

1. The advantage and well-being of the pupil are the ends to be sought in all the work of the school, and so in the curriculum. There is some danger that in our emphasis upon the proper point of view in Biblical study, and on the principles of psychology and pedagogy as necessarily controlling the construction of the curriculum, we shall forget that all these things are of value to the Sunday school only as they promote the welfare of the child. Pedagogy has no interests of its own. The Bible requires no service. Psychology is for man, not man for psychology. The Book is for the child, not the child for the Book.

2. The moral and religious well-being of the pupil is the specific aim of the Sunday school and of the curriculum. The school of technology exists also for the benefit of the pupil; but not specifically and directly for his moral and religious well-being. The Sunday school is a religious institution—it seeks a moral and religious end. And what is true of the school as such is true of its curriculum.

3. The curriculum should be based upon a sound psychology, and in particular should recognize and avail itself of all well-attested results of the study of the development of the human mind from childhood to youth and manhood.

4. The Bible should be the chief subject of study. The tradition which has made the Sunday school in large part a Bible school rests upon a sound basis. Christianity has its roots, historically, in the Bible; and in no small measure experientially also. The instinct of the church has been wholly right in giving to the Bible the central place in its school. The betterment of the Sunday school will not come through deposing the Bible

¹ An address delivered at the Philadelphia Convention of the Religious Education Association.

from that place. But that it should be the *sole* text-book is more than can be rightly claimed. To insist that the pupil in the kindergarten shall be taught solely from the Bible is to violate the principles already laid down, disregarding the laws of psychology, and making the child for the Bible instead of the Bible for the child. To exclude from the adult division of the school courses in missions, church history, applied ethics, and the like, on the ground that the Sunday school is a Bible school, is to fall into the same error. The Bible should have the central place in the curriculum of the Sunday school; but it should hold that place by virtue of what it is and what it can do, not on the basis of any *a priori* opinions.

5. The curriculum should be based on a sound and true view of the Bible. The construction of a curriculum does not presuppose a knowledge of all the teachings of the Bible, but it is demanded that those who are to arrange the curriculum shall have as a prerequisite to the performance of their work a knowledge of the contents of the several parts of the Bible, and a sound view of what the Bible is. Indeed, it is only upon the basis of some view of the Bible as a whole that one can make intelligent choice between the graded and the ungraded curricula. And the matter becomes still more important when, having determined that the curriculum is to be graded, one seeks to lay down the principles that are to guide in its construction.

But what is that sound and true view of the Bible which should underlie the curriculum? Three views may be considered here:

First, the Bible may be held to be substantially homogeneous throughout, every part able to yield moral and religious precepts or theological propositions, which can be directly culled from it or gained by a species of allegorical interpretation—a loaf of bread, to use a favorite metaphor of those who hold this view—sweet and good, and of about uniform quality through crust and crumb. One who holds this view of Scripture is not likely to favor a graded curriculum at all. The advantages of uniformity—with its necessary consequence, the ungraded curriculum—will outweigh for him any betterments to be secured by a graded curriculum with its different subject of study for the pupils of each grade.

Secondly, the Bible may be held to be a collection of maxims, stories with morals, essays, and the like, varying in respect to the degree of intelligence or maturity of mind necessary for the understanding of them, yet each valuable for the lesson which it conveys, taken by itself and independent of its relation to the whole or its place in a process of historical development. If one hold this view of Scripture, it may lead him to the adoption of a curriculum so graded that the several grades and classes of

pupils shall study those portions of Scripture, be they stories, psalms, essays, letters, visions, which contain or will yield those maxims that are adapted to the stage of development which the pupils in the respective grades have severally reached.

Thirdly, the Bible may be regarded as a collection of the literary records of a most significant religious movement—sources for ascertaining the history of the most significant religious experience of which human history affords a record, a religious experience not of a man but of a nation, centuries long, rooted in soil of an almost unknown antiquity, finding its mountain peak in the life and teachings of Him who remains for us today after all the centuries the Prince of religious teachers, the Ideal of humanity, the matchless and unsullied Revelation of the Heavenly Father. To one who takes this view of the Bible it will follow not simply that the curriculum of the Sunday school shall be graded in order to assign the easier parts of the Bible to the younger children, the more difficult parts to the more mature pupils, but that the whole curriculum shall be so constructed as to lead up to the fullest apprehension possible of that truth which is taught by the Bible, taken as a whole, and viewed as the history of God's self-disclosure to that nation to whom and through whom, in the person of its prophets, apostles, and Messiah, God has disclosed himself more fully than to any other nation since the world began.

Let it be recognized and at once confessed that there is an element of truth in both the first and second of these views, especially in the second, and that this too is an element important to be considered in the construction of the curriculum of the Sunday school. The Bible does contain many beautiful stories, adapted by their beauty and interest to attract the child, and by the truth which they suggest to convey to him needed moral lessons. It does contain beautiful psalms, instructive maxims, impressive aphorisms, which lodged in his mind in youth, when memory is receptive and retentive, will help now to shape the still plastic character, and in coming years will reveal more and more of their meaning and truth. The Bible does contain essays and letters, sermons and visions, of varying degrees of difficulty of interpretation, and capable perhaps of being arranged in an ascending scale, from the easiest to the most difficult, from the simplest to the most profound.

But neither the first nor even the second view tells the whole truth about the Bible. Both overlook that fact of tremendous significance to which the third attempts to give due recognition. Space fails me to put forth here any adequate defense of it. I must be content with announcing my own adherence to it, with affirming what I believe most of my readers

will assent to, that all the recent progress of biblical study has made it increasingly clearer that the Bible yields its deepest and most surely attested message to humanity only by a thoroughgoing historical study of it—a study which seeks to read in this transcendently significant record of religious experience the long sentence of divine thought that is written in the successive centuries of the history of the nation of Jesus the Christ. The Bible contains the materials for ascertaining the history of that experience, in which, step by step through centuries the great truths of morals and religion were disclosed to the minds of men capable of receiving them. If we would use this body of literature for its highest educational value, if we would make it in the highest degree instrumental in the moral and religious development of the child, we must teach him the lessons of this great history of divine revelation.

The modern historian, whether he deal with the history of Rome or France or England, is not content merely to be a chronicler of events, or Æsop-like to find in the successive occurrences of history a *haec fabula docet*. His task is to discover the meaning of that whole sweep of history with which he deals. Facts he must have, and facts in their order. Imagination he must have, not to invent facts, but to conceive them vividly. But beyond this he must have insight, the power of historical interpretation, the gift to discover in facts, set in relation, the truth that is greater than all facts. It is in this large historical spirit that we must learn to deal with the Bible. It is these great truths that underlie and shine through biblical history that we must aim to convey through our teaching of the Bible.

Accepting then, the element of truth that is contained in each of these three views of the Scripture, and especially holding fast that which is contained in the third view, what further principles can we lay down to guide us in the construction of the curriculum of the Sunday school?

6. The center of gravity of the curriculum intellectually should be in the discovery, through historical study, of those central truths which are taught by the Bible, viewed as the record of religious experience and of a process of revelation of religious truth. When I say that this should be its center of gravity, I mean that the earlier years of the curriculum should lead up to a course in biblical history, in which the pupil should gain some true, even if imperfect, conception of the historic process of disclosure and discovery of truth, of which the Bible contains the record, and that the subsequent courses should tend further to explicate and illuminate this great historic movement. Such a course in biblical history would necessarily deal with events; yet even more with the history of ideas, and with events chiefly as expressing or illustrating ideas.

7. The whole curriculum should be pervaded with the interpretative spirit. The Bible is literature, much of it literature noteworthy for its beauty, all of it susceptible of interesting study purely from the point of view of literary form. But the primary purpose of literature—this is at least true of the literature of the Bible—is to convey thought. And literature yields its thought only to the interpreter. Biblical history may be ascertained from the literature of the Bible, but only by a process of interpretation. The Bible is full of truth—profound, inspiring, saving; but that truth can be extracted from the words only by interpretation. For formal instruction in the principles of interpretation there may be no place in the Sunday-school curriculum. But the interpretative spirit and point of view should pervade the whole; and the sooner the pupil whose mind is sufficiently mature to be able to do so acquires the habit of approaching every passage or book he takes up for study, with the question, What does this mean? the sooner he will have acquired the right mental attitude toward the literature of the Bible.

8. The curriculum should somewhere furnish the pupil with a general survey of the Bible as a whole, given him from such a point of view as to leave him with as true a notion of the character of the biblical books, and of the nature of the collection as a whole, as he is capable of grasping at this period of his study. This course should be introduced as early as the pupil is really capable of pursuing it intelligently, that he may have the benefit of it in his future study.

But these principles which are demanded by the truth contained in the third view of Scripture must not be allowed to exclude regard for that element of truth which lies in the others. Nor must we so do violence to the facts of psychology as to undertake to make the whole curriculum either formally historical or formally interpretative. We must therefore add another principle.

9. The curriculum must avail itself of the fact that the Bible contains many pieces of literature, which in themselves are capable both of being made attractive to the child and of being employed as the media for conveying religious instruction adapted to his stage of development. There are short stories which can be told as detached units; there are longer biographic narratives, fitted to interest and instruct children not yet prepared for broader-horizoned historical study; there are commandments, and parables, and psalms; there are shining sentences of religious truth, and shining examples of noble character. Many of these stories, and commandments, and psalms can be stored in the memory of the child, not as mere words conveying no meaning, but as beautiful caskets, attractive

now for what discloses itself to his youthful mind, destined to become more attractive and more serviceable when in later years they yield to maturer thought their inner contents. Of these elements of the Bible the curriculum-maker must avail himself for the construction especially of the earlier years of the curriculum, using them at the same time for the immediate religious instruction of the child and storing them up for future use in the historical work which is to form the central point of the curriculum.

The actual construction of a graded curriculum for the Sunday school is a task that can be successfully accomplished only by co-operation of scholars and workers in different fields of knowledge and effort, or by the labors of persons whose knowledge and experience cover several fields not often covered by one person. The biblical scholar must bring his broadest and most intelligent view of what the Bible contains and what it is. The psychologist must bring his knowledge of the child and of the process of the development of his intellectual powers and his religious nature. The intelligent Sunday-school teacher must bring his practical experience. Then all these must be fused together to furnish the curriculum-maker the wisdom that he needs. It is not a task to be accomplished in a day. With the best wisdom we possess we must frame provisional plans. Experience must test, correct, and revise these, till little by little we find our way to a curriculum that will be serviceable for the end we seek, the highest well-being of the pupil as a moral and religious being. We are as yet only on the threshold of our task.